

3. AN UNREPORTED POPULATION OF THE GRIZZLED GIANT SQUIRREL *RATUFA MACROURA*¹KUMARAN SATHASIVAM², V. SANTHARAM³, K.V. SUDHAKAR⁴ AND T. BADRI NARAYANAN⁵¹Accepted April 25, 2008²29 Jadamuni Koil Street, Madurai 625 001, Tamil Nadu, India. Email: k_sathasivam@yahoo.co.in³Institute of Bird Studies & Natural History, Rishi Valley Education Centre, Rishi Valley P.O. 517 352, Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh, India. Email: vsram2003@yahoo.co.in⁴10 South Leith Castle Street, Santhome, Chennai 600 028, Tamil Nadu, India. Email: kvsudha@gmail.com⁵262, 2nd Main Road, Gomathipuram, Madurai 600 020, Tamil Nadu, India. Email: badrit@vsnl.com

The Sirumalai Hills are a compact range of hills in Tamil Nadu, southern India. They are located in Dindigul district, with the centre at roughly 10° 13' N, 78° 15' E. The Sirumalais extend over an area approximately 20 km long and 13 km wide. They are outliers of the Western Ghats, close to the Palni Hills. The highest peaks in the Sirumalais are nearly 1,400 m high. A plateau of 1,000 m height is a significant feature of this hill range. The slopes of the hills are fairly steep. The plateau is cultivated and has scanty and degraded natural forest, whereas the slopes are well forested.

While surveying the Sirumalais for birds in 2006 and 2007, we found the Grizzled Giant Squirrel *Ratufa macroura* at various locations (Table 1).

At every instance we saw the squirrels, except at Velampagne, where we only heard their calls. Kolinjipatti is at the foothills, and all the other locations are on the plateau. From our discussions with the staff of Kandighe Estate, we learnt that the animals are regularly seen in their estate and that even three to four animals have been seen together at times.

The Grizzled Giant Squirrel is an endangered species and has been reported from only a few locations in India: the Srivilliputtur Grizzled Giant Squirrel Sanctuary (Joshua and Johnsingh 1994), Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary (Ramachandran 1989), Kudirayar in the Palni Hills (Davidar 1989), Muttatti in Karnataka (Karthikeyan *et al.* 1992) and Sathanur Dam (M. Krishnan pers. comm. to K.V. Sudhakar). Its total population in India has been estimated at just a few hundred individuals (Joshua and Johnsingh 1994).

The Sirumalai Hills must now be included in the select list of locations where the Grizzled Giant Squirrel is found. Our records of five or six individuals from well-separated parts of these hills suggest that a significant population of this endangered mammal exists here.

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Table 1: Details of records of the Grizzled Giant Squirrel *Ratufa macroura* in the Sirumalais

Date	Location	Number of individuals	Habitat
August 2006	Kandighe Estate	1	Riverine
April 2007	Horticultural Station	1	Riverine habitat with many old and tall trees as well as introduced trees such as Eucalyptus, Pine and <i>Grevillea</i> sp.
July 2007	Velampagne	1	Disturbed forest and silk cotton plantations
September 2007	Kolinjipatti	2, possibly 3	Riverine forest (including tall <i>Terminalia arjuna</i> , <i>Albizia lebbek</i> , mango, and tamarind trees); deciduous forest; fruit and coconut plantations

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